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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 001831

SIPDIS

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/28/2015

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SUBJECT: TURKEY DEFERS ON TDA STUDY OF SECOND TURKEY-IRAQ
BORDER CROSSING

REF: ANKARA 1283

Classified By: DCM Robert Deutsch for reasons 1.4 b & d.

11. (C) Summary: The GOT considers additional border crossings with Iraq a high priority, but contrary to recent indications, it continues to insist that the second border must be constructed according to the Turkish proposal -- with the crossing near the Syrian border and new roads running south to Mosul. MFA DG for Economics Oguz Ozge told visiting TDA Regional Director Dan Stein and DCM on March 29 that Turkey will stick by its position and was confident that "we can persuade" the new Iraqi government that the Turkish proposal is best. As a result, the GOT did not feel a TDA feasibility study of the alternatives for a second border crossing and road network was necessary. End Summary.

12. (C) Following up on MFA U/S Tuygan's inquiry to Ambassador Edelman about our 2004 offer to fund a TDA feasibility study of a second border crossing with Iraq, TDA Regional Director for Europe Dan Stein and DCM met with MFA DG for Economic Issues Oguz Ozge March 29 to explain the U.S. proposal. DCM said the U.S. supports agreement between Iraq and Turkey to build a new border crossing to relieve stress on the Habur Gate crossing and support growing trade. The U.S. was offering the TDA study as a way to evaluate the various alternatives available (including the site of the crossing and the supporting road networks) and clarify issues for the two sides to focus on in their discussions which seem to us to be at a stalemate, despite both sides commitment to additional border gates.

13. (C) Ozge explained that currently there is only one route from Turkey through the Habur Gate into Iraq -- via the Zakho Pass, Dohuk and Mosul -- and that this route is already near its capacity. Turkey does not think it makes sense to build a second border crossing (as proposed by Iraq) that would feed into the same crowded roads leading from Zakho to Mosul; the GOT considers it essential to build several border crossings and routes into Iraq to support the expected boom in Turkey-Iraq trade. He said that Turkey would continue pursuing acceptance of its proposal for a border gate at Ovakoy and new roads over the tigris to Mosul as the first additional project.

14. (C) Ozge emphasized that there are "no hidden motives" behind Turkish insistence on its proposal. He noted that Turkey did a feasibility study in 1996 that demonstrated that the Turkish proposal was the best option; therefore a TDA study was not necessary. He suggested that agreement on a third or fourth gate could follow quickly agreement on the second gate, and a TDA feasibility study of those options might prove useful -- but only after conclusion of the second border crossing as proposed by Turkey.

15. (C) Ozge said that Turkish officials have talked with Iraqi government officials and Talabani, who agree that several additional border gates are desirable. Once the ITG is formed, he said, the Turks are confident they can persuade them this proposal is best. He added that KDP head Masud Barzani opposes the Turkish plan because he fears that he will no longer be able to collect fees from Turkish drivers entering Iraq. Ozge admitted, however, that the Turkish proposed route would still run through KRG territory for about 10 km. He insisted that "we can persuade Barzani, too." In a previous conversation, Ozge's deputy Mehmet Gucuk suggested that Turkey could "partially compensate" Barzani; one option would be to guarantee a minimum flow through the Zakho route.

16. (C) DCM emphasized that a TDA study could not proceed on a limited basis and asked Ozge to clarify the GOT position. Ozge responded that Turkey did not need the TDA study now, but added that "we welcome your help." He suggested that officials from Turkey, the ITG and U.S. meet together to reach agreement on the second border gate. DCM responded that the U.S. would be glad to join as an impartial observer as long as both sides invited the U.S. to participate. However, he emphasized that Turkish officials will have to convince their Iraqi colleagues, pointing out that the Iraqis may not have full confidence in the Turkish feasibility study.

17. (C) Comment: The Ambassador intends to follow up with U/S Tuygan to confirm the GOT decision to defer a TDA study and

assure him that we continue to support efforts by Iraq and Turkey to build additional border crossings.

18. (U) Baghdad Minimize Considered.

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